

DELEGATE MARY A. LEHMAN
Legislative District 21
Prince George's and
Anne Arundel Counties

Environment and Transportation
Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 317
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3114 · 410-841-3114
800-492-7122 Ext. 3114
Mary.Lehman@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 699 GRIEF SUPPORT – OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
SUPPORT**

GOOD AFTERNOON MADAM CHAIR, MADAM VICE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE
HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE.

I AM HERE TO ASK YOUR FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION OF HB 699, A UNIQUE
AND MUCH NEEDED APPROACH TO GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR THOSE WHO
HAVE LOST A LOVED ONE TO SUICIDE OR A FATAL OVERDOSE.

GRIEF SUPPORT WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF
MEDICAL EXAMINER FOR BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND OCME EMPLOYEES AND
FUNDED BY THE OPIOID RESTITUTION FUND.

THIS IDEA WAS BROUGHT TO ME BY JOHNS HOPKINS RESEARCHERS WHOSE
LIFE'S WORK IS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND THEREBY PREVENT DEATH BY
SUICIDE, WHICH THEY MORE BROADLY REFER TO AS SELF-HARM.

THIS INCLUDES OVERDOSE DEATHS THAT OFTEN ARE ACCIDENTAL. THIS
DEDICATED GROUP OF WOMEN AND MEN SEE GRIEF SUPPORT WITHIN THE OCME
BEING A NATURAL FIT SINCE THAT AGENCY IS DEALING WITH FAMILIES AND
OTHER LOVED ONES IN THE AFTERMATH OF DEATH BY SELF-HARM. OCME

EMPLOYEES WOULD ALSO BE ABLE TO ACCESS THIS MUCH-NEEDED SUPPORT BECAUSE THE WORK THEY DO IS SO INTENSE AND EMOTIONALLY TAXING.

THE OCME WILL HOUSE THIS PROGRAM IN CONSULTATION WITH THE MD BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION. AS DRAFTED, HB 699 CALLED FOR DIRECT GRIEF COUNSELING SERVICES WITHIN BHA; HOWEVER, THAT WAS NOT THE INTENT AND DOES NOT MAKE SENSE GIVEN THAT BHA DOES NOT PROVIDE DIRECT SERVICES. AFTER SPEAKING WITH MDH AND MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATES, I HAVE SUBMITTED AN AMENDMENT THAT MODELS THIS GRIEF COUNSELING INITIATIVE AFTER SIMILAR PROGRAMS IN NEW MEXICO AND THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA IN WHICH GRIEF SUPPORT IS PROVIDED THROUGH THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER.

WHILE THE STATE OF MARYLAND HAS THE FOURTH LOWEST SUICIDE RATE IN THE COUNTRY, OUR SUICIDE RATE HAS INCREASED 19% FROM 9.1 TO 10.8 DEATHS PER 100,000 POPULATION BETWEEN 2015 AND 2019. IN 2018, SUICIDE WAS THE 11TH LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN MARYLAND AND THE SECOND-LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH AMONG 10- TO 24-YEAR-OLDS IN THE UNITED STATES.

COUNTLESS MARYLAND FAMILIES HAVE EXPERIENCED THE DEVASTATING LOSS OF A LOVED ONE BY SELF HARM. MY ONLY BROTHER DIED BY SUICIDE 11 YEARS AGO, SO I CAN TELL YOU FIRSTHAND HOW INCREDIBLY HARD IT IS TO PROCESS THIS KIND OF LOSS. EVEN THOSE WITH STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEMS MAY HAVE NO ONE EQUIPPED TO HELP THEM AND MAY NOT KNOW WHERE TO TURN. THAT IS WHERE OCME GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES COME IN.

IF AN INDIVIDUAL HAS EXPERIENCED A LOSS FROM SUICIDE OR A SUBSTANCE USE OVERDOSE, THEY WILL BE PROVIDED WITH RESOURCES ON HOW TO HELP

PROCESS THEIR GRIEF AND COUNSELING IN WHICH THEY GET A SAFE SPACE TO TALK ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS SURROUNDING THE PASSING OF THEIR LOVED ONE.

I URGE THE COMMITTEE TO GIVE HB 699 A FAVORABLE REPORT.